AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED ON THE

FOURTH OF JULY, 1798,

AT ST. PAUL's CHURCH,

BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN

OF THE

CITY OF NEW-YORK,

ASSEMBLED TO COMMEMORATE THEIR NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE.

By JOHN WELLS, Esq.

NEW-YORK:

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1798.

BRITISH MUSEUM

AT a meeting of the Committee appointed to act generally for thoſe YOUNG MEN *of the City of New-York, who have pledged themſelves, and are ready to turn out at a moment's warning, in ſupport of Government, held at Hunter's Hotel, on Thurſday, July* 5, 1798.

ON MOTION,

Reſolved Unanimouſly, *That Anthony Bleecker, John M. D. Laurance, and John E. Seaman, preſent the Thanks of this Committee to* JOHN WELLS, *Eſq. for the ſeaſonable and patriotic Oration delivered by him before the Youth of this City on the 4th Inſtant; being the Anniverſary of our National Independence, and to requeſt of him a copy thereof for publication.*

By order of the Committee,

Signed, *WILLIAM H. ROBINSON, Chairman.*

AN ORATION, &c.

IN common with the People of America, we are once more met in commemoration of THAT DAY, the recollection of which muſt awaken all the feelings of American pride, and call forth thoſe noble energies of the ſoul, which governed our FATHERS in the Declaration of that Independence, which it will be the ambition and boaſt of her Sons to maintain.

A people, at ſtated periods, publicly recognizing the origin of their NATIONAL EXISTENCE, and the eſtabliſhment of their SOVEREIGNTY, affords a ſpectacle no leſs intereſting than uſeful. Contemplating the free ſpirit of our country—acquainted with her rights—reſiſting the firſt encroachments of unauthorized power—ſtruggling againſt injuſtice, though, unequal to the combat—and determined, at every hazard, to oppoſe the lawleſs invaſion of her liberties—the warmeſt intereſt is excited in her fate—the ſtrongeſt joy in every ſucceſs, and the ſevereſt ſorrow in every defeat.

HAPPILY

AN ORATION.

HAPPILY for us, the firm zeal of our councils, and the undaunted proweſs of our arms, enable us to review the firſt periods of our national hiſtory with THAT PRIDE, which reſults from the conſciouſneſs of having ſprung from ANCESTORS, who, *diſdaining* the reſtraints of colonial dependence, NOBLY DARED BE FREE.

FREQUENT recurrence to firſt principles, will always be attended with advantage—obſerving them in all their original purity and force, their value and importance will be impreſſed on the mind, and we will be better enabled and diſpoſed to correct their abuſe or corruption, to renovate their vigor, and enforce their obſervance.

IN this view, the ANNIVERSARY we are NOW CELEBRATING has its *peculiar* uſe: it reminds us of the virtuous enterprize of our anceſtors—their high opinion of the bleſſings of CIVIL LIBERTY—the full enjoyment of their unimpaired rights—their *ſolemn determination to periſh with their country, ſooner than become the ignoble vaſſals of domineering power*, and teaches us, in the moſt emphatic language, the duties which we owe to our country and poſterity: and accurſed be that ſpirit, which is ſo far ſunk in *poverty*, that does not catch the generous enthuſiaſm from their *illuſtrious examples*, and SWEAR *that ſuch ſhall*

FOR

FOR EVER be THE CHARACTER of AMERICANS!

In the hiſtory of man, ſo few are the epochs diſtinguiſhed by their favorable influence on the liberty and happineſs of our race, that they may be conſidered rather as extraordinary departures from the eſtabliſhed courſe of things, than thoſe which placed man in his proper condition in a ſtate of Society.

The fluctuations and revolutions in Governments, have generally been the ſtruggles of contending factions for aſcendancy, conteſts for the ſceptre of power, in which the PEOPLE have occaſionally been uſed as machines without ſharing in the glory or advantage of ſucceſs, or meeting with ſympathy or compaſſion in defeat. The reſult to them has been a change of Rulers without any addition to their happineſs. *Individual ambition*, and not *public good*, being the purpoſes to be anſwered, the fluſh of victory has rather ſerved to exaſperate reſentments, than moderate the paſſions —and the PEOPLE, *deceived* with the hope of better days, have not unfrequently found their burthens encreaſed, and their miſeries enlarged—little conſolation has it been to them, that after the tumultuous ſtorms of internal convulſions, the returning ſun of peace and order, has only exhibited a new

race

race ſucceeding to the throne of departed maſters. Little cauſe have they had to mark thoſe epochs as the returning ſeaſons of national feſtivity. They have not produced to them, in common with us, thoſe ſources of congratulation which enliven recollection—which ſhed the cheerful beams of happineſs on all around—which mark the exultation in the greeting countenance—and proclaim the FREEDOM OF THE PEOPLE, the juſtice of their laws—the excellence of their government—their *confidence* in its *adminiſtration—their attachment to their country*, and the orderly ſubmiſſion of all claſſes to its rightful authorities.

THE few nations in the tranſatlantic world, who have enjoyed *any portion* of civil liberty, have not unfrequently ſmarted under its loſs; and with great difficulties, regained that of which their indolence or folly had deprived them. Their charters of re-acquired powers and privileges, have been crimſoned with the beſt of blood, and their confirmation obtained by the force of arms. The national character has been re-eſtabliſhed only by a diſplay of valour, equal to the weakneſs by which it had been loſt; and the turbulent field of battle, inſtead of the peaceful council, has been the theatre on which the *rights of the people* have been traced by the point of the ſword, and confirmed by the armour of war. They have been wreſted by violence

lence from the hand of that uſurpation, which they themſelves had ſuffered to be raiſed over them; and from the continued exerciſe of which, nought but the returning ſpirit of the NATION could have ſaved them. Their hiſtory, therefore, through its chequered varieties, conſtantly preſents that picture of inſtability, which pourtrays the character of a people not uniformly watchful of their liberties, and regardful of their rights—although they may find occaſions for the exerciſe of an honourable pride in the intrepid conduct of their anceſtors; yet, it will not be unattended with chagrin and mortification, that ſpirits ſo capable of greatneſs, ſhould at any time, be found to have ſo far forgotten themſelves, as, ſlumbering on their poſts, to betray the citadel confided to their charge.

HOWEVER great therefore the pleaſure may be to them of commemorating THOSE DAYS which have marked the *dignity* of *national character*, yet is the feſtivity clouded with the ſad remembrance of ſervile meanneſs, or the moſt condemnable indifference—if *glory* dazzles on the one hand, its *ſplendor* is diminiſhed on the other. The occaſional eſtabliſhments of their liberties, are rather to be conſidered as the reſults of favorable accidents, than the fruits of any uniform ſyſtem of rights.

BUT, our progenitors who firſt ſettled this country, brought with them thoſe *genuine principles of liberty*, which have governed it ſince its firſt eſtabliſhment. They underſtood thoroughly the *rights* which belonged to the PEOPLE, and thoſe which pertained to their Rulers. They had not learned thoſe *deadly doctrines* of MODERN LIBERTY and EQUALITY, which by deſtroying all diſtinction, robs the magiſtrate of his power, and the people of their reaſon. Educated in the wholeſome ſchool of *Engliſh juriſprudence*, they acquired thoſe rational maxims of *civil liberty*, which will forever ſerve as the PROPS and ORNAMENTS of the ſociety in which they are cultivated. They prized too highly the bleſſings of *ſelf-government*, to ſubmit to the ſmalleſt exerciſe of undelegated power. Their proud ſpirits would not brook the approach of *tyrannical authority*, though cloathed in the commanding garb of *parental right*. They refuſed to clank their chains to the nod of *any maſter*, or bend their necks to any yoke, however light or eaſy the burthen. Adhering to *theſe* principles, and determined to ſupport them at the hazard of *their lives*, *their fortunes*, and *their ſacred honor*, that revolution, whoſe commencement we are *now* celebrating, was originated and completed.

OUR fathers then preſented to the world an example of *greatneſs*, *wiſdom*, and *zeal*, which are unequalled

unequalled in the annals of man, and which muſt do honor to America, as long as intrepidity and virtue ſhall have a votary on earth.

HAVING at the cloſe of our revolutionary war, eſtabliſhed a character as a *brave, free* and *independent people*, no nation ever roſe into notice, under more auſpicious circumſtances. And ſince the eſtabliſhment of our federal government, no nation has improved to more favorable advantage; the opinion which had been formed of us, and more rapidly encreaſed their happineſs, proſperity, and reſpectability.

THE people of this country, have abundant cauſe therefore to felicitate each other on the early and uniform opinion they have diſplayed of *liberty* in its *rational ſenſe*—of the induſtrious care with which our anceſtors firſt eſtabliſhed it—of the zeal and bravery with which our fathers defended it—and the pious ſolicitude with which they have tranſmitted to our hands a reputation unſtained by diſhonor—unſullied with baſeneſs.—A criſis has arrived in our affairs, in which the queſtion is to be *ſolemnly determined*, whether we WILL continue to maintain *this honorable*, and *independent character*, or fix upon it an indelible diſgrace, by ſubmitting to become the tributaries of a foreign power. FRANCE has advanced propoſitions, and made demands upon this country, which, if once acceded to, will

will *annihilate* the *dignity*, *honor*, and *independence* of the nation.

THE point now to be decided, involves in it no leſs than our NATIONAL EXISTENCE;—for its deſtruction has been threatened, unleſs we comply with terms compatible *only* with the moſt degraded ſtate of vaſſalage. There can be no *American*, true to the intereſts and honor of his country, who can, for a moment, contemplate, with patience, the *diſgraceful* alternative—who does not feel every nerve braced for OPPOSITION, and, EVERY DROP OF BLOOD FLOWING WITH REDOUBLED VIGOR!

IF any wretch can be found ſo baſe as to deſert his country, in the hour of danger—to ſhrink from the ſervice ſhe may require of him—or ſtill to be the *advocate* or *apologiſt* of an implacable and overbearing foe, a *mark* ſhould be put upon his forehead to ſingle him out as a fit object for the execrations of his countrymen, the deteſtation of mankind, and the *everlaſting curſe of his God.*

BY the conduct which the PEOPLE of this country ſhall NOW adopt, will be determined, perhaps, forever, whether a nation can long exiſt under a form of government, *purely republican*: if it ſhould be found that, in the ſhort lapſe of twenty-two

ty-two years, *domeſtic faction*, co-operating with *foreign intrigue and influence*, have ſo far ſucceeded in the profligacy of their ſchemes, as to over-awe the councils of our country, to rob them of their energy, and deprive them of their power, as it would forever diſgrace our national character, ſo it would have a tendency to caſt ſuch an odium on the very ſyſtem itſelf, as would in all probability, forever deter any further experiments on the ſame plan.

THE honor of our government, therefore, is now at ſtake; its character about to receive a ſtamp that it will forever carry, of firmneſs and dignity, or imbecility and meanneſs; and the country is called upon for its united ſupport that the *independence*, which has been atchieved, may be preſerved, and continue to prove *our ſtrong hold in times of national trouble and difficulty*. It will otherwiſe ſerve no other purpoſe, than to have elevated us to a rank among the nations of the earth, to become more conſpicuouſly the object of public contempt—to be pointed at with the finger of ſcorn, as a people boaſting of their ſuperior virtue, and enlightened freedom, *without the courage* and *reſolution* to defend them againſt the attacks of the *moſt awful tyranny which has ever threatened the earth*.

BUT,

BUT I cannot indulge the ungenerous ſuſpicion, that *ſuch* will be the fate of my country. I will rather cheriſh the nobler belief, that my countrymen, animated with one common ſpirit, will produce to the world A SECOND and MORE GLORIOUS inſtance of their unſhaken determination to LIVE *a free and independent* people.

THOSE who ſtill ſurvive our revolutionary war, who took a part in its intereſts—who ſhared in its glorious and honorable fatigues, know too well the value of their hard-earned labours, to ſuffer them to be ſnatched from them without an effort for their preſervation—And the YOUTH of AMERICA, rouſed by the reſentments, and animated by the *example* of their FATHERS, will preſent a bulwark to their country againſt *foreign invaſion* and *domeſtic faction*.

THE independent ſpirit of America will thus maintain our national character free from blemiſh, and perform one of the *firſt* and *moſt ſacred duties* a country owes to itſelf, and which no reaſons of policy or convenience ſhould ever prevent it from exerciſing—Without ſelf-reſpect, how are we to obtain it from others—without an erect and dignified conduct at home, how are we to command it abroad?

abroad? The importance to the community, of national *pride* and *honor*, cannot be too deeply impreſſed—they are the beſt guarantee of our *independence*—and the ſafeſt ſecurity againſt aggreſſions.

THAT people, who, on all proper occaſions, give unequivocal proofs of their fixed determination never paſſively to ſubmit to injuſtice and inſult, and who poſſeſs the power and determination, at all times, to repel their approach, will be much leſs ſubject to *provocation*, than ſuch as by the puſilanimity of their councils—the cowardice or weakneſs of their citizens—are known to poſſeſs diſpoſitions that will *temporize* with *diſgrace*, and *compromiſe* with *diſhonor*. A nation which will once ſtoop to ſuch meanneſs, will find that her pacific diſpoſitions will be attended but with little advantage: if ſhe ſhould fatten upon her diſgrace, ſhe only makes herſelf the ſurer ſpoil of ſome more daring foe.

THESE remarks are drawn from the *preſent ſituation* of our country, which loudly calls for the exerciſe of VIGOR and FORTITUDE in every deſcription of people, to *maintain and ſupport the conſtituted authorities*, our *ſovereignty* and *independence*.

THE

THE republic of FRANCE, towards whom we *once* felt the livelieſt regard—in whoſe fortunes we took the warmeſt intereſt—and in whoſe proſperity we gave the moſt unequivocal proofs of joy, has repaid thoſe flattering tokens of reſpect and eſteem by a ſeries of injuries, inſults and contumelies, the recollection of which, muſt excite, in every *American boſom*, the warmeſt indignation, and the keeneſt reſentment.

OUR *nation*, yet in infancy—our *government*, not yet matured by experience—nor ſtrengthened by practice—our *commerce*, extenſive and unprotected—our *country*, recovering from the ſtruggles of our revolutionary war, our population rapidly encreaſing—our *property*, riſing in value—the *induſtry* and ENTERPRISE of our citizens, amply rewarded, ALL combined to render PEACE too deſirable a condition to be lightly departed from. —The councils of our country have accordingly, with unremitting aſſiduity, *ſought to heal the differences* which have exiſted between the two republics by *reiterated attempts* at *honorable* and *amicable negociation*—by a fair and candid diſcuſſion of facts, to place the conduct of our government in that upright and independent view, which comported with national faith, and national intereſts. But, our miniſters of peace have been *rejected* with *ſcorn*, and

and their offers of conciliation with *contempt*. An appeal to the juſtice of our claims has been treated with *ridicule*—our ambaſſadors have been denied their diplomatic character, and even a permiſſion to diſcuſs our complaints, except upon terms which ſuppoſe in the character of the American people, a degree of *abject meaneſs*, no leſs wounding to our pride, than inſulting to our underſtandings.

What! The free-born ſons of America *become the vaſſals of France!—ſurrender their ſovereignty at the firſt ſummons of an inſolent foe!—tarniſh their dignity, and forever diſgrace the character ſo bravely won!*

To what purpoſe have ſo many rivulets of blood flown—ſo many valuable lives been loſt, to eſtabliſh our Independence, if it is now to be *ſacrificed* at the *polluted ſhrine of French rapacity and dominion.* The wounds are ſcarcely healed which were acquired in the eſtabliſhment of our liberties—the ground is ſcarcely cold, which was enriched with the blood of departed patriots—the groans of the dying ſoldier, who nobly fell in the defence of his country, are ſtill tinkling upon the ear, when we are called upon to abandon our *Independence* and ſovereignty,

ſovereignty, gained by the calamities of a ſeven-years war—And this, not as a compenſation for injuries done—not as an atonement for offences committed—not for the improper or profligate uſe of our national powers; but, for the high crimes of *aſſerting* and *maintaining* our right to ſelf-government—of chooſing for ourſelves the poſition moſt profitable and advantageous during the European conflict, and preſerving it with honour and good faith—of forming ſuch compacts as we thought beſt calculated to ſettle paſt differences, and ſecure the obſervance of juſtice in future—of taking ſuch meaſures as would enable us to ſteer a courſe clear of the tempeſtuous ſea, by which Europe has ſo long been agitated!

CAN *any American* be found who can *patiently* contemplate this *dictatorial* and *inſulting* conduct on the part of FRANCE? if there be, let him be told, in addition thereto, that if their demands are not implicitly complied with, they have threatened to overwhelm us with *fire*, with *ſword*, and with all the horrors of *Domeſtic Faction*—to *divide our Union*, to *cruſh our Government*—and parcel us out among the powers of Europe, as their pleaſure or convenience may dictate!—If the paſſiveneſs of his temper is proof againſt *this*, he is a diſgrace to the land which gave him birth—Nay, to any land but that which is ruled by a *French Directory*.

WITH

WITH views thus hoſtile, which have been unequivocally declared to you, and which are now known to the world, can any man heſitate between a *peace*, which at one blow annihilates every thing ſacred to us as a nation, or *war*, accompanied with every difficulty which imagination can trace, in defence of our liberties—our conſtitution—religion and laws.

RECOLLECTING the occaſion on which we are met—the high example ſet us by our *FATHERS*—it ſhall never be ſaid that the YOUTH of AMERICA are ſo far ſunk in ſlothful degeneracy, as to be indifferent to the fate of their country—to be idle and unconcerned ſpectators of the gathering cloud, whoſe aſpect ſpeaks deſtruction—and whoſe burſt upon our unprepared heads, will leave us in ruin.

MANY of us, my young friends, during that war, which eſtabliſhed our Independence, were yet in the cradle of infancy—our youthful arms were not yet ſtrung for war—our nerves not yet braced for hardy action; but the firſt ſentiments with which our infant boſoms glowed, were the love and honour of our country, and the firſt wiſh we were taught was, *that we had been able to fight by the ſide of our fathers.* *They* have now grown old, and to us devolves the ſacred truſt

of

of *maintaining that Independence*, which they, with ſo many glorious toils acquired.

LET us fully diſplay the *true American Character*—mild and forbearing in peace, proud and powerful in war; for it is not now to be concealed that our only ſafety is in the UNION and VIGOR of our *councils*, and in the ſtrength of our ARMS. It is by the weapons of war, that we are now to enforce that juſtice, which we have ſought for with the moſt unfeigned ſincerity, or that we can even maintain our internal governnment and ſovereignty.

THE rapacious *monſters* of France have breathed their peſtilence over Europe—marked their footſteps with deſolation and deſtruction, and covered the land on which they have trod, with the blood of the juſt and the tears of the innocent—with the Syren ſong of *pretended* liberty, they have enchanted the ear, and intoxicated the brain of their deluded votaries, until they have made them the fit inſtruments of every ſpecies of *ſacriledge*, *murder*, *rapine* and *violence*, which can heap diſgrace on the name of man.

NOT ſatisfied with the progreſs they have made in Europe, they are about to traverſe the Atlantic; and our country is doomed *next* to grace the

the triumphs of their arms.—Already have they boaſted of their means of ſedition—*the diviſions of the people*—and the ſtrength of their party.—Already have they diſcloſed to us *our fate*, by reminding us of that of *Venice*, to which we ourſelves may add the afflicting examples of *Genoa*, *Holland*, and *Switzerland*.

NOUGHT, therefore, is left for *us*, but by a vigorous preparation for *war*, either to avert its evils, or be enabled to meet them with proper reſolution and advantage—a war which will involve in its iſſue every thing which can be ſacred to us as men, and valuable to us as citizens.—Let us, therefore, no longer indulge in the idle dreams of conciliation—in the deceitful hopes of negociation—but rely on our own ſtrength for the maintenance of our *rights*, and the redreſs of our *wrongs*.

UNDER the adminiſtration of an executive, who has nobly declared that his hand ſhall never ſign the ingnominious deed, which ſhall ſurrender the ſovereignty of his country, we may truſt our moſt unreſerved confidence.

THIS is the temper which ſhould animate every *AMERICAN*, and which would eſtabliſh our *INDEPENDENCE* beyond the power of the univerſe.

In

In competition with *that*, wealth, eaſe, and private convenience, ſhould be held as nought. Determined to live a free and ſovereign people, let every exertion be made, every arm be raiſed in defence of the country—and, if it *muſt* fall, *let us periſh with it*—let no one ſurvive the diſgrace—let no one live to be told that the ſpirit of America was ſubdued.

If this ſolemn determination be THIS DAY taken, relying on the juſt providence of *our God*, *our Independence* will ſtill be ſaved—its value will be enhanced—and our poſterity will feel the encreaſed duty of preſerving an inheritance gained and tranſmitted to them with ſo much blood, toil, and difficulty; and *we*, ourſelves, may live to ſee our country *Triumphant*, *Honoured and Reſpected*. 9 | 7 | 49

FINIS.